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Of Schooners and Sagamen: Anglo-Icelandic Tourism in the Nineteenth Century

Thomas Spray

This paper will demonstrate how the construction of nationalist identity changed the focus of British maritime travel to Iceland from the geo-environmental to the literary, exploring the figure of the travelling English 'Sagaman' across the nineteenth century. Firstly, through a comparison of accounts of travel to Iceland in the two halves of the nineteenth century, it will consider how Anglo-Scandinavian seafaring was bolstered by interest emerging from interaction with the Icelandic sagas. Secondly, it will look at the concurrent construction and expansion of the sea lines of communication between Britain and Iceland during this period.

In 1856 Lord Dufferin set out in the schooner yacht *Foam* to Iceland in an attempt to sample the peculiarities of the alluring 'True North.'¹ His self-chosen expedition title: 'Navigator, Artist, and Sagaman' (Dufferin 1903, xxiv). In the mid-1800s such non-trade-related travel to Iceland was not unheard of. Many seafarers were drawn by scientific interests: as shown by a contemporary traveller Charles Forbes, in his 1860 account of *Volcanoes, Geysers, and Glaciers*. Yet Dufferin's approach was indicative of an increasing interest in Iceland as an English nationalist's ideal. The top theories of the day suggested that the Scandinavians had given the British Empire many of its finest inherited qualities, paving the path for imperial greatness (Dufferin 1903, 219). As a preserved sample of a common, early northern European culture, Iceland was ancestral ground. Its literature and histories provided important studies in racial construction. As Forbes put it, all that was good about Britain could be 'traced to the spark left burning upon our shores by those northern barbarians' (Forbes 1860, 81).

The Icelandic sagas, medieval accounts of the histories and legends of early northern Europe, were simply unavailable to the public in the early nineteenth century, published only in the original Old Norse and in rare and costly Latin translations (often via other Scandinavian languages). Nationalist engagement with Iceland, in the form of travel accounts stressing Anglo-Icelandic similarities, was undoubtedly linked with the rise of translated saga literature. Publications such as Walter Scott's *Eyrbyggja saga* extracts and George Dasent's *Njáls saga* translation encouraged a wave of seafaring artists, novelists, and poets to pick up their pens and set sail for Iceland. William Morris, Anthony Trollope, and W. G. Collingwood were just a handful of well-known names amidst a veritable crowd of literary pilgrims. Back in Britain, general interest in northern antiquity, encouraged through the works of writers such as Percy,

¹ Frederick William Hamilton Temple Blackwood, 1st Marquis of Dufferin and Ava (1826-1902), came from Irish nobility and served as a British diplomat and ambassador for numerous countries including Canada, France, India, and Russia. His account of his voyage to Iceland and Norway was one of the most popular Victorian travel books, and at his death was approaching its eleventh edition. For more information see Hansson 2009.

Blackwell, Thorpe, and Laing, both supported and inspired research into the leading theories of northern Romantic Nationalist philology. Dufferin's account drew eagerly from these, particularly Scott's *Eyrbyggja saga* extracts (although he did not always credit Scott) and Laing's *Heimskringla*, picking and choosing elements as he pleased (Dufferin 1903, 96-98; 31). Such combinations of nationalist-framed translations and ethnographic histories encouraged yet more travellers, including the explorer Richard Burton, intent on mapping the racial characteristics of the north.

Ice and Fire: Accounts of Travel to Iceland 1800-1860

In order to contextualise this development, one should consider the focus of Anglo-Icelandic sea-faring in the early nineteenth century. Sabine Baring-Gould, who published his *Iceland: Its Scenes and Sagas* in 1863, listed eighteen other travel accounts available to the English reader – provided they took the occasional dip into German (Baring-Gould 2007, lxxvii). While many of these authors were interested in the literature of Iceland, the focus for the majority of travel between Britain and Iceland was trading opportunities, racial profiling, or scientific discovery. On the literary front, the poetry and mythology of the *Eddas* had long been subject for discussion, but the Icelandic 'family sagas', or *Íslendingasögur*, did not seriously make their mark on the public's imagination until the publication of George Webbe Dasent's *The Story of Burnt Njal* in 1861, even with such eminent early admirers as Sir Walter Scott.

Instead, profiles of Iceland took a scientific angle. The scientist Joseph Banks visited the country in 1772 and although he never published his notes he lent them to the travellers of the early 1800s, notably William Jackson Hooker. Banks neither visited saga sites nor engaged with the sagas themselves, despite collecting a large number of manuscripts including a copy of *Njála* (Add. 4867) which he later donated to the British Library (Halldór Hermannsson 1966, 15-17; see also von Troil 1780, ix; 30). None of the party spoke Icelandic. On returning to Britain, Banks remained an expert on Icelandic matters but his engagement was largely dictated by Britain's open hostilities with Denmark in the early 1800's. The government was interested in the possibility of seizing Iceland by force, and Banks was essentially asked to construct a plan of attack. '500 men,' he suggested, could comfortably take the entire country with little if any loss of life; Banks argued Iceland was logically a part of the British Empire anyway, this being in his mind all that was accessible only by sea (Halldór Hermannsson 1966, 29; 31). Constructed with the help of Banks' notes, William Jackson Hooker's account of his 1809 trip follows similar lines of interest. Hooker explains that he had been inspired by the earlier voyage and longed to see the volcanoes and the hot springs (Hooker 1813, i). Brief flirtations with antiquity and even the book's pictures are adopted second-hand from Banks or Ólafsson & Pálsson, and Hooker does not dwell on the sagas (Hooker 1813, lxxxiii-lxxxiv; Ólafsson & Pálsson 1805, 154).

Sir George Steuart Mackenzie obviously sailed and rode past several saga sites in his 1810 travels. Mackenzie's principle goal was mineralogical research alongside exploring the 'many extraordinary natural phenomena' of Iceland, chiefly the eponymous Geysir (Mackenzie 1812, ix-x). For non-geographers Mackenzie's account had something of a first: an extensive dissertation on Icelandic literature written by co-traveller Henry Holland. Yet it transpired this was not as useful as one might have hoped. Holland's dissertation relied heavily on Latin sources rather than Old Norse originals, and his discussion on sagas rested almost entirely on the works of Mallet, Herbert and Scott (Mackenzie 1812, 15; 32). In situ, the pair spectacularly failed to discuss the *Íslendingasögur* relating to the areas through which they travelled, managing all of Snæfellsnes without a hint of its *Eyrbyggja saga* and the heart of Fljótshlíð without naming *Njáls saga* once (Mackenzie 1812, 185; 253).

They were not alone. George Clayton Atkinson, friend and biographer of Thomas Bewick, showed more interest in birds than books in his 1833 trip (Atkinson 1989, xi). For Atkinson it was the passing fulmars, puffins, guillemots, and auks which occupied pride of place in his illustrations (Atkinson 1989, 93; 96). The infamous gorges and crystal-clear waters of Þingvellir, backdrop to many a historic event, were chiefly of interest for the fact that some contained harlequin ducks (Atkinson 1989, 130). Similarly, John Barrow's 1834 tour was dotted with borrowed literary knowledge but contained little original material. His aims in travelling to Iceland were twofold: he wished to compare the Icelanders' national composition of character with that of the Norwegians and to view first-hand the 'subterranean fire' for which the island was by then renowned (Barrow 1835, ix). As with Banks, Barrow's lack of Icelandic meant he overlooked the significance of several historical sites.

As late as 1860, tourists such as Charles S. Forbes managed to stare saga sites in the face and walk on unawares. His first sight of Iceland revealed a fog-shrouded land: 'this mysterious isle of sagas and sayings,' but soon it transpired that Forbes was more interested in the geology and geography of the country (Forbes 1860, 30). He was undoubtedly intrigued by the saga genre but as with his predecessors he relied heavily on the earlier accounts mentioned above. His brief discussion drew almost exclusively from Konrad Maurer's *Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart*. Forbes had more time for *Eyrbyggja saga*, telling with relish the tale of 'The Berserker-way' (taken directly from Scott's translation) and commenting that 'every peasant in the country narrates the story' (Forbes 1860, 217). Indeed, unlike those before, he is aware of the general areas occupied by the sagas. Looking southwards from the top of Hekla, he mentions that the general area is home to 'the famous Njáls Saga' (Forbes 1860, 278). But his authority on the matter is frequently undermined by his mentioning sites of saga narrative with no apparent realisation of their significance (Forbes 1860, 169-171).

Travellers from elsewhere in Europe demonstrated a similar focus. Neither the Swedish Uno von Troil's 1780 collection of letters, nor the Viennese Ida Pfeiffer's self-proclaimed all-encompassing 1845 account included much to whet the appetite of saga-readers (Von Troil 1780; Pfeiffer 1852). The subjects of Von Troil's letters provide an idea of foreign interests in Iceland: eight of the twenty-five concern the physical geography of the country, and the remaining letters deal largely with the constitution of Icelandic society, with only a passing reference to the sagas (Von Troil, 1880). In the first half of the nineteenth century, Anglo-Icelandic seafaring retained a scientific focus, with attractions such as the volcano Hekla and the hot springs of Geysir taking centre stage. Saga-tourism would have to wait.

The Rise of Saga Tourism: Travel Accounts 1861-1900

A notable exception of the early 1800s, Ebenezer Henderson travelled to Iceland in 1814 and 1815 as part of a mission to hand out bibles to the inhabitants in the extremities of the country (Henderson 1818, vol. 1, 2). Henderson included a map which clearly marked several important saga sites, and while he did not dwell on them for long, he receives credit for being one of the few (almost the only) in the first half of the century to acknowledge the important locations of *Njáls saga* such as 'Hlydarenda' – a good indicator of interest in Icelandic literature as they lie on the south coast, on the main sea line and easily visible from the water (Henderson 1818, vol. 1, 335; see Wawn 2000). Henderson offered his own emendations to Walter Scott's *Eyrbyggja saga* extracts, and while he often strayed further from the Old Norse than Scott did, he clearly had the interest of his readers in mind (Henderson 1818, vol. 2, 59-63; Percy 1947, 525-527). Henderson's literary engagement paraphrased Holland's 'Preliminary Dissertation' and his history of Iceland skipped over the commonwealth period with alarming brevity, yet he saw importance in the early Scandinavian histories as an influential factor in the development of national character: Icelandic was the mother tongue of the northern peoples; its sagas displayed classic northern values such as political liberty and personal autonomy (Henderson 1818, vol. 1, xxxv-xxxvi).

In Henderson's time the classic ground in Iceland for the 'Sagaman' was the Snæfellsnes peninsula, made famous through Walter Scott's brief but measured *Eyrbyggja saga* extracts, first published in 1814 and republished in I. A. Blackwell's 1847 edition of Bishop Thomas Percy's *Northern Antiquities*. For travellers after 1860, inspiration more than likely came from George Webbe Dasent's 1861 translation of *Njáls saga* – an *Íslendingasaga* of immense scope, detailing cross-generational blood-feud on Iceland's south coast. Dasent's translation was almost two decades in the making, and had an influence on writers even before its publication. Sabine Baring-Gould and Frederick Metcalfe both referred to it in their travel books of Iceland, despite it having yet to be published. *The Story of Burnt Njal* drew attention to Iceland as a location for

high literature and enjoyed a long uncontested position of authority, being the only English translation of one of the most popular *Íslendingasögur* for over ninety years. Its influence is apparent. The focus of Anglo-Icelandic seafaring after Dasent is remarkably different, with saga sites replacing geological interests as the main reason to visit the country.

The reverend Frederick Metcalfe visited Iceland in the summer of 1860 and his book came out the same year as Dasent's translation. While Dasent used Metcalfe's descriptions in order to give a scenic grounding to his saga, clearly Metcalfe had had access to Dasent's text too (Metcalfe 1861, 5). Metcalfe presents the British society of the mid-nineteenth century as deeply versed in the sagas; his friends recommend that he travels there, 'to see with your own eyes the spots we have been reading of in the Sagas' (Metcalfe 1861, 3). Metcalfe's reasons for his travel, as he explains to the Rector of the High School in Reykjavík, are those of the genuine literary tourist:

"I want to see with my own eyes some of the places where the scenes of your Sagas and legends are laid. I belong to a nation arrived at a very high state of civilisation, artificial in the extreme [...]. And somehow this very modernism begets a desire for reverting now and then to old things, old people, old ballads, old customs – something fresh, and rare, and vigorous. I want to look for a bit at the rock from whence we were digged."

(Metcalfe 1861, 56-57)

Metcalfe's visits to these sites of northern antiquity displayed equal parts scientific intent and poetic scope, as he endeavoured to gauge the realities of the sagas for readers back home and to use his imagination to populate the landscape. Similarly, in Sabine Baring-Gould's 1863 travel account, in which he set the scene for the following years with his focus on the 'Scenes and Sagas' of Iceland, we find mentions of the excellence of Dasent's *Burnt Njal*, only recently in print. Baring-Gould quotes from Dasent ('our highest English authority on the subject') at great length and fully recommends his saga translation (Baring-Gould 2007, xli-xlii). For the like-minded among his readers Baring-Gould supplied in an appendix a list of existing published Icelandic sagas – although not, much to his displeasure, published in English (Baring-Gould 2007, 440-446). While in Iceland, Baring-Gould rarely stops thinking about sagas, noting sites from the sea and including pictures for his readers (Baring-Gould 2007, 5-7). His own life-long interaction with *Grettis saga* found public popularity in *Iceland: Its Scenes and Sagas*, wherein he provided episodic adventures adapted from his favourite of the *Íslendingasögur*.

For Dasent's own travels of Iceland one has to consult *Travels by 'Umbra'* of 1865. 'Umbra' (aka Charles Cavendish Clifford) toured the country in 1861, the same year *Burnt Njal* was published (Clifford 1865, 1). One of Clifford's travelling companions was a 'Mr. Darwin' (Dasent), and subsequently his translation features prominently. 'Umbra' is anything but a reliable narrator (see Clifford 1865, 156). One believable aspect of his narrative is the claim that

Dasent's name 'was a passport' affording them the highest treatment, as all the clergymen whom they met knew his saga translation well (Clifford 1865, 53). In 1871 and 1873 the poet and medievalist William Morris took ships to Iceland, and was treated with similar reverence. On the back of his first voyage he composed two poems on Iceland: 'Iceland First Seen' and 'Gunnar's Howe above the House at Lithend,' the latter drawing on first-hand experience of the *Njáls saga* location. He and his fellow translator Eiríkur Magnússon visited the site, and spent two nights there (Morris 1911, 47-49). Sampling the locations and lifestyle of the early settlers was a vital factor for Morris (Morris 1911, 51-6). Morris' second trip in 1873 produced more concise notes, and lacked the grandeur of the earlier writings, yet once again Morris sought out saga sites as key stops on his itinerary (Morris 1911, 198).

Richard Francis Burton travelled to Iceland in 1872. Burton is often portrayed as an anti-saga writer (see Wawn 2000), but while it is true that he accuses other travel writers of having 'Iceland on the brain' – allowing romantic notions of the perilous or heroic North to cloud their judgement – he nevertheless provides a comprehensive description of the land (Burton 1875, vol. 1, x). Burton claimed to have read forty-nine separate accounts of Iceland, which if nothing else demonstrates the level of attention Iceland had gained from the British since the start of the century. Among these accounts, he found Baring-Gould's book indispensable, largely for its ornithological data and notes on volcanism (Burton 1875, vol. 1, 44; 77; 172). Moreover Burton had read Dasent's translation and mentioned the saga sites as: 'classic ground' (Burton 1875, vol. 2, 155). Quite against his reputation, Burton found particular episodes of the sagas to be outstanding in depth and pathos.

Steamers to Iceland were not solely reserved for the adventurous. Robert Angus Smith, knew and respected Dasent's translation when he set out for Iceland, but finds exploration by land a daunting prospect; 'We are almost afraid to come near,' he remarks of the south coast (Smith 1873, 33;121). On the timid side, and overly wary of the perils of northern travel even for the time, Smith largely limited his expeditions to Reykjavík. He even opted out of the customary trip to Geysir, still very much a feature of Anglo-Icelandic tourism. Other converts to saga literature found themselves or the saga sites wanting. Under the chapter title 'EXPLANATION' Samuel Edward Waller explains that *Burnt Njal* was the main reason behind his painting holiday of 1872: 'I had gone through Dr. Dasent's admirable version of the book with the very deepest interest, and was wild to visit the scene of such a tremendous tragedy' he tells his readers (Waller 1874, 1). *Njáls saga*, Waller explains, is the greatest of all the sagas, and Njáll himself is clearly a personal hero of the painter's – 'a man of peace among a population of vikings' (Waller 1874, 3). Waller provides a short summary of the saga, stressing the beauty of the landscape. This last point is constantly on his mind during the trip. 'The air was exquisite and our ride delicious' he tells readers, 'We passed through the sweetest scenery I had yet to

come across in Iceland' (Waller 1874, 75). This devotion to the saga reached lofty heights, and it is not surprising that Waller's actual experience turned out to be underwhelming. On reaching Gunnarr Hámundarsson's farmstead, 'the most sacred spot in all the country,' he finds it to be 'very still, very quiet, and utterly desolate and forgotten' (Waller 1874, 112-113; see also 115). Waller's disappointment was consolidated when an effort to sketch the wonderful view seen by Gunnarr as he walked down to the seafront (a defining moment in the narrative of *Njáls saga*) turned to disaster. He was trapped in a sheep-pen by an angry bullock and unheroically escaped by striking it on the back with a piece of wood while it was not looking (Waller 1874, 116-119).

Drawing on her travels in 1875, 1878, and 1879, Elizabeth Jane Oswald placed the bar higher still for sagamen and sagawomen in her publication *By Fell & Fjord* of 1882. By this time, Oswald explained, British tourists were generally drawn to Iceland by, 'the fishing, the geology, or the old literature' (Oswald 1882, 1). Oswald was clearly in the latter camp, being the first to produce a saga map and stressing the unique nature of her book in that it looked at Iceland *through* the sagas (Oswald 1882, 40-41; preface). She frequently mentioned her debt to sagas in the original Old Norse as well as translations such as Dasent's (Oswald 1882, 34). By her second visit, only the original would do (Oswald 1882, 138). Oswald was not overly impressed by the sites themselves. Waller's pilgrimage site is merely a 'poor farm' from whence the view was obscured by 'driving vapours and rain' (Oswald 1882, 155). Oswald's account demonstrates an increase in literary awareness further exhibited in William Mitchell Banks' 1880 voyage. Banks pointed his readers in the direction of *Burnt Njal*; to get a true impression of the nation, one had to read its tales (Banks 1881, 34-35). For all his teasing (see in particular chapter 4: Banks 1881, 38-49), Banks proved throughout his book to be a genuine saga fan.

Towards the end of the century saga-tourism showed no signs of abating. Between 1894 and 1914 Mary Disney Leith visited Iceland several times (Gunnar Guðmundsson 1993, 27-40). She acknowledged saga sites and indeed planned her trips to take in important locations: in 1896 making a trip with the expressed purpose of visiting the *Njála* country (Disney Leith 1897, 16-17; 62; 143; 145). In the 1895 *Original Verses and Translations* she wrote several poems in response to these travels, and seven in response to Dasent's *Burnt Njal*. Another northern scholar, W. G. Collingwood, toured Iceland in 1897, and was also among those inspired by Dasent's translation. Collingwood was enthusiastic in writing to his young daughter on the significance of the saga sites, something of which she was apparently well aware. He played out the actions of the characters and interacted with their landscape: 'the house and the howe I have painted,' he tells of a particular scene; 'I have crossed the river, and seen the view he saw and drawn it too' he remarks of another (Collingwood & Stefánsson 2013, 110). This idea of an interactive 'pilgrimage' was not new: Disney Leith used the term on her many trips to Iceland, particularly on trips to the churches and farmsteads of *Njáls saga* (Disney Leith 1897, 138).

To Iceland by Boat

Poems on re-discovered sagas were not the only indication of a dramatic shift in Anglo-Icelandic tourism. Aside from the content of travel literature, one might also consider the frequency of scheduled ships from Britain to Iceland in the two halves of the nineteenth century. Whereas early travellers were forced by necessity to arrange expensive private transport or bargain with those in the fishing industry, in later decades trips to Iceland could be taken almost on an impulsive inclination. Joseph Banks' ship took forty-eight days to sail from Britain to Iceland, with extensive planning required, setting sail on the 12th July 1772 and arriving on the 28th August (Halldór Hermannsson 1966, 6). In 1809, by contrast, William Hooker managed the trip in under three weeks, departing from Graves End in the *Margaret and Anne* on Friday 2nd June with first sight of Iceland on the 14th and arrival in Reykjavík on the 21st (Hooker 1813, 1;5;9). Oswald, like many before her, took a steamer from Leith; by her 1879 trip the voyage from Britain to Iceland had been shortened to a mere five days (Oswald 1882, 4; Mackenzie and Forbes also employed steamers out of Leith). In the latter half of the nineteenth century last-minute trips were not uncommon (see for example Forbes 1860, 5).

Perusing the extant nineteenth-century travel accounts, one can slowly construct a picture of the sea lines between Britain and Iceland. Atkinson's 1833 trip employed the *Ardincaple* from Newhaven, via Edinburgh (Atkinson 1989, xxv). In 1834 Barrow used the yacht *Flower of the Yarrow* (Barrow 1835). In acquiring transport, nineteenth-century travellers often had to contend with political and military tensions between Britain and her neighbours. In the first decade of the century, hostility between Britain and Denmark made travel particularly difficult. Two days into Hooker's return voyage, Danish prisoners of war set fire to their ship and the crew were phenomenally lucky to be rescued by the *Orion* (Hooker 1813, 360-364). The writer Anthony Trollope's 1878 voyage was similarly affected when their steamer – the *Mastiff* – was recalled due to the possibility of war with Russia, the ship being needed for transporting troops (Stone 1998, 147). Private vessels provided a way around this inconvenience, and in the latter half of the century most notions of Iceland as a distant, dangerous wasteland had been dispelled. Instead, trips north were treated more as relaxed vacations: as shown by Dufferin's travels in his schooner yacht *Foam* and William Mitchell Banks' 1880 party of fifteen aboard the *Argo*. Robert Angus Smith accepted an invitation of a 'holiday' to Iceland on a friend's yacht *Nyanza* and together they took their five children (Smith 1873, 1).

Richard Burton provides us with by far the most comprehensive list of available sea lines, with a chapter on 'Communication and Commerce' (Burton 1875, 219-224) describing the current state of contact between Britain and Iceland. November 29th to February 15th, Burton explains, was a dead period with little or no activity from even postal ships. During the summer

however there were plenty of opportunities for the common traveller. The first regular transport was provided by the 'old *Arcturus*', built on the Clyde and carrying Scottish engineers and a Danish crew. According to Burton, the *Arcturus* weighed 280 tons, boasted eighty horse-power, and ran between four to six trips per year: '£2, 2s for 8 days' board, wine and whiskey' (Burton 1875, 223; see also Stone 2005, 224). Metcalfe took this ship from Grangemouth on the 16th July 1860, after reading an advert in *the Times* (Metcalfe 1861, 1). A little under a year later, on the 10th June, Joseph Shackleton (an older relative of Ernest) did the same (Stone 2005, 223). Business certainly seemed to be strong in Shackleton's time, with twenty-five passengers including many tourists, or as Shackleton puts it: 'pleasure seekers, or as it might please them better, we will say travellers for the promotion of science' (Stone 2005, 224). Yet pleasure seemed to be a good way off. The ship's heavy build did not lend itself to the northern seas, and clearly much of Shackleton's voyage was blighted by sea-sickness (Stone 2005, 226).

Following after the *Arcturus* came the *Diana* – a mail steamship converted from a man-of-war and run by the Danish government. *Diana* increased the number of trips to five to seven per year (Burton 1875, 223). The painter Samuel Edward Waller sampled its delights in 1872, and was violently seasick along with the rest of the passengers (Waller 1874, 30). Difficult weather was common and the way was frequently perilous. On Mackenzie's voyage the sea was so rough that a member of the crew fell from the main-yard and died (Mackenzie 1812, 76). After narrowly escaping being burnt alive, Hooker's already unpleasant journey home was made worse when one of the accompanying boats was smashed in two during a violent storm (Hooker 1813, 368). Toward the end of the century, Oswald remarks that a proposed winter service was hastily cancelled when the *S. S. Phönix* was lost in abnormally foul weather (Oswald 1882, 135).

Aside from the storm-tossed *Diana*, by 1872 Burton had yet further choices. The *Jón Sigurðsson* was a 460 ton, iron-hulled Norwegian steamer operating out of the Shetlands, and was described as 'broad, tubby, and high out of the water' (Burton 1875, vol. 2, 90). Also available was the *Queen* of the Aberdeen, Leith, and Clyde Shipping Company, and the *Yarrow*, a Glaswegian vessel owned by a Mr. Slimon (Burton 1875, 268-269). Of Mr. Slimon's continuing business Oswald writes that 'communication with Iceland is now more frequent than in the year 1875' after Slimon established another steamer, the *Camoens*, from Granton to Iceland; Oswald mentions that a Danish mail steamer was also in operation 'from March to November about once a month between Copenhagen and Iceland, calling at Leith' (Oswald 1882, 135). At the close of the century such mail ships were still the most reliable method of transport for literary wanderers. On her first trip, Disney Leith took the Danish mail steamer *Laura* from Granton via the Faroes to Reykjavík. The steamer was lively, with other British passengers going to fish in Þingvellir (1897, 5). Many features of the modern tourist experience in Iceland were present,

including the boost in the summer population; 'So many visitors of all sorts seem to come that it rather demoralises the Icelanders' comments Disney Leith (1897, 21).

Increasingly reliable schedules, a host of fresh saga translations, interest in the Romantic north, the decline of Danish naval power and subsequent rise of Icelandic nationalism – clearly there were many factors affecting the development of sea lines of communication between Britain and Iceland in the nineteenth century. What is clear from the above accounts is that British travel in the latter half of the nineteenth century was dictated by literary interaction with the north. The modern British traveller in Iceland is most likely to be geographically inclined – drawn by retreating glaciers and renowned geysers. It is intriguing to imagine a period in which the sagamen (and women) held sway.

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